

## Dealing with “abandoned” Wild Animals

Every spring, people call the Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry with reports that they have found young animals that seem to have been abandoned. Often these young creatures are found near homes and cottages, or in local woodlands.

To most humans, the sight of baby animals often brings on an instinctive urge to protect them from harm. The cries of the hungry young adds to the seeming urgency of the situation, so people tend to act quickly by removing the animals from the site and taking them home or to another sheltered place. However, once they arrive home, they begin to realize that they have taken on a responsibility for these young animals and therefore, they need to know what to do. It is often at this point that they call a conservation officer or wildlife biologist to get some advice.

Their biggest mistake was removing the young from the wild in the first place. Often their parents are off foraging in another area and will return later on. It is common for creatures such as raccoons or skunks to spend extended periods away from the den and to leave their young alone. The young are relatively safe and will fair quite well if left alone and undisturbed. Most people also do not realize that when they handle a young animal they imprint their smell onto that animal and this new scent helps predators to find them more easily.

In other cases, the person’s suspicions are correct and the parents have been killed by a predator or injured in an accident. This means that the young will not receive the care they require and will eventually die. This may sound hard but it is the way of the natural world. Every year, nature produces a surplus of young animals. In any given year, only a few will survive to adulthood while most will perish for any number of reasons. This provides nourishment for the young and adults of other species and prevents overpopulation among their own species.

There are also some legal, health and financial considerations people should think about before taking in “abandoned” or injured wildlife. Most wild animals can have parasites, feces, and fungus on their skin, claws and fur and they can bite or scratch so handling them without the proper precautions can cause serious injuries and diseases in humans.

It is also illegal to “rescue” wild, native animals on PEI, even if they appear to be abandoned. However, you can report injured animals to the Department and staff will see that they are collected and disposed of in a safe and humane manner.

Nature will take care of these “abandoned” animals its own way and the best approach is to leave them as you found them. For more information on Island wildlife, visit [www.gov.pe.ca/go/wildlife](http://www.gov.pe.ca/go/wildlife)